

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KINGSTON 001888

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR WHA/CAR (BENT)
NSC FOR SHANNON
SOUTHCOR FOR POLAD AND J7 (RHANNAN)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/05/2015

TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [JM](#)

SUBJECT: PNP INSIDER COMMENTS ON RACE TO SUCCEED PRIME
MINISTER

REF: KINGSTON 01652

Classified By: Pol/Econ Chief Mark J. Powell for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

1. (U) Summary: On July 28, Pol/Econ Chief and Poloff met with Balfour Denniston, local businessman and member of the People's National Party's (PNP) National Executive Committee (NEC), the ruling party's highest decision-making body outside of its annual conference. Denniston shared his perspective on the current state of the PNP succession race, and offered his thoughts Prime Minister PJ Patterson's announcement that he might not step down before local government elections in 2006. End Summary.

2. (C) At a two-day session of the People's National Party's (PNP) National Executive Committee (NEC) held on July 23 and 24, Prime Minister PJ Patterson surprised many observers by announcing that he would likely remain in office long enough to lead the party through local government elections in June 2006.

Although the Prime Minister has never stated explicitly when he plans to demit office, it previously was widely expected that he would step down around March 2006. On July 28, Pol/Econ Chief and Poloff met with Balfour Denniston, local businessman and long-standing member of the NEC, which is the party's highest decision-making body outside of its annual convention. Denniston, who attended the NEC, offered his thoughts on the announcement, which, he asserted, did not surprise party insiders. He said that Patterson is known to want to complete a number of initiatives before his departure in order to secure his legacy. Specifically, Denniston mentioned Patterson's desire to lead the G-77 in New York in September as Prime Minister and G-77 Chair. Observers also suggest that presiding over a victory in the 2006 local government elections would be something of a vindication for Patterson, whose record in national elections was tarnished when the PNP lost in 10 of 12 parishes in 2003.

3. (C) Denniston proffered that Patterson wishes to stay in office long enough to allow his preferred successor, Finance Minister Omar Davies, time to consolidate his campaign. While Davies still lags well behind most other PNP candidates, polls indicate that the Finance Minister has recently begun to gain some ground in the race (Ref A). By staying on in office longer, Patterson hopes that the Davies' "Campaign for Prosperity" will continue to strengthen, said Denniston. He added that Davies' support is very strong in the local business community (an important source of campaign contributions), and that some international lending institutions have all but said that they, too, favor Davies. The Finance Minister's recent movement in the polls, said Denniston, is eroding some of National Security Minister Peter Phillips' support, because the two candidates share a similar support base.

4. (C) Denniston explained that the Prime Minister favors Davies at least in part because of his (Patterson's) contentious history with the two current frontrunners, Phillips and Portia Simpson Miller, Minister of Local Government, Community Development, and Sports. Simpson Miller openly defied Patterson and the PNP when, while serving as acting Prime Minister in late 2004, she abstained during a vote called by the Jamaica Labor Party (and opposed by PNP MPs) in Parliament in favor of desperately needed funding for the fire services. (Though widely popular with the general public as a "principled position" given the decrepit state of the fire brigade, her abstention provoked vehement condemnation from very senior members of the PNP, who were embarrassed by the crack in their parliamentary solidarity. Foreign Minister K.D. Knight even shouted an expletive at Simpson Miller in Parliament, an outburst for which he subsequently apologized.) Denniston says the party has distrusted Simpson Miller ever since. Phillips, Denniston said, is a holdover from the 1989-1992 Michael Manley administration who could not be marginalized by Patterson because he controlled the party's invaluable donor list. Denniston cited as an additional source of Patterson/Phillips friction the National Security Minister's more pragmatic views on cooperating with the United States. Phillips, he said, had once opposed Patterson during a Cabinet discussion of the war in Iraq, something Denniston

emphasized had not gone down well with Patterson or with some of the other ministers present.

15. (C) Within the party, Denniston asserted, Phillips nevertheless commands the support of much of the Cabinet, the NEC, most PNP Members of Parliament, and the delegates, while Simpson Miller is extremely popular with the general public. Denniston said that this distinction makes national polls unreliable, since public surveys tend to skew in favor of the popular choice and do not accurately reflect the support of the delegates who actually call the shots. He added that, despite Simpson Miller's overwhelming public support, the party continues to doubt her leadership ability. Because the PNP prides itself on the level of education and perceived intellect of its leaders, Denniston said, a Simpson Miller presidency would be "an aberration." Simpson Miller is frequently criticized for lacking the intellectual capacity to govern; she is the only PNP candidate without an advanced degree. Her response to date has been to state publicly that she has extensive relevant experience in charge of several ministerial portfolios, and that she would also rely heavily on advisors to govern the country. The latter notion has been met with derision within the party, according to Denniston. "Why not just let the advisors lead the country?" he asked. Denniston has said in the past that, were Simpson Miller to win the party presidency, Davies' skill and international contacts would make him the de facto leader.

16. (C) Denniston said that Patterson will very likely leave office at least one year before the next general election, which must take place by October 2007. By putting a successor in place by mid-2006, he explained, the PNP will leave its new leader, who will be the acting Prime Minister, an entire year in office before the national vote takes place. Having a candidate so entrenched in the position will give the incumbent PNP an obvious advantage over Jamaica Labor Party leader Bruce Golding.

17. (C) Comment: The extremely personable Denniston, a PNP veteran, claims once to have served as a campaign manager for Phillips. In a party and society in which an advanced degree in any subject often means considerably more to one's prospects for advancement and for commanding respect than demonstrated competence in any field of endeavor (including politics), he clearly holds little regard for the prospect of Simpson Miller as PNP leader and prime minister. Denniston's analysis generally tracks with what we have heard from other contacts about the PNP's internal race to succeed Patterson. Unlike the JLP, however, which is only just emerging from a bitter, protracted and very public succession battle to replace 30-year party leader Edward Seaga, the PNP largely manages to shield its internal jockeying for leadership from public view, avoiding messy headlines self-inflicted wounds. It is early days yet, but with elections due by October 2007, the ruling party does not seem overly concerned with Golding.

TIGHE